

Testimony of Connie Marshall
Deputy Mayor, City of Bellevue, Washington
Before the Senate Commerce Committee
Bellingham, March 13, 2000

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, and thank you for coming to Washington State to hear about this critically important public safety issue. My name is Connie Marshall; I am the Deputy Mayor of the City of Bellevue, Washington. Bellevue is an urban city of 107,000 residents located directly to the East of Seattle, on the shores of Lake Washington. We are a major job center in the Puget Sound region, a major retail center, and home to many beautiful single family and multi-family neighborhoods.

When the Olympic Pipeline exploded in Bellingham, I can honestly say I had no idea that this same pipeline ran 11 miles through our City. I can also tell you that since that time, I and the rest of my Council and our City staff have spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars getting up to speed on this issue. Our Mayor, Chuck Mosher, was appointed by the Governor to serve with Bellingham Mayor Mark Asmundsen on the Washington State Fuel Accident Prevention and Response Team, formed in response to the Bellingham accident.

What we have learned in these past months has not reduced our fears that an accident like the Bellingham tragedy could happen in Bellevue. To the contrary. We have no confidence that the Olympic Pipeline is safely operated and maintained within the City. We are greatly alarmed at the complete lack of any automatic shut-off valves on this pipeline within the City. From what we have learned, we have even less confidence that the federal Office of Pipeline Safety is able to provide adequate or meaningful oversight of pipeline operations here or elsewhere in the country. Our citizens are scared and demanding action. But our ability to respond is extremely limited due to federal pre-emption in this area.

In Bellevue, the Olympic Pipeline runs through several single family neighborhoods, under a City Park, past a City golf course, by a middle school and a community swimming pool. There are 11 schools and one community college within ½ a mile of the Olympic Pipeline in Bellevue. The pipeline also transverses numerous creeks within Bellevue which are the subject of Endangered Species Act recovery actions.

The pipeline also runs under two major freeways: State Route 520 --which is the main artery to the Microsoft campus and other businesses in Bellevue and Redmond; and I-90, our major East-West freeway across the state. In fact, the Olympic Pipeline runs underneath I-90 less than 1/3 of a mile from what is one of the busiest freeway interchanges in the state: where I-90 crosses under I-405. Why am I telling you about these freeways? For a very important reason: our consulting engineer with extensive expertise in pipelines tells us that the locations where Olympic Pipeline crosses under SR 520 and I-90 are in fact the 2 most vulnerable points of the Pipeline within Bellevue. This is because they are the lowest topographical points, where gravity exerts the most pressure on the pipe. One can only imagine the damage to our City and to this

region if the Pipeline were to fail at these points. Increasing this risk, there are NO automatic shut-off valves anywhere within the City. There are only two manual shut-off valves on the 20 inch pipeline at locations within the City. Our engineer tells us that in event of a rupture, before it could be shut off, the pipeline would drain as much as a million gallons of fuel, four times more than was involved in the Bellingham accident. And, due to our hilly terrain, we are also told that existing technology *cannot detect* slow leaks in the pipeline. Yet this is within current federal standards? *How can this be allowed within a densely populated urban area?*

Olympic last tested this pipeline in 1996 and 1997. They found over two dozen “anomalies” on the pipeline within Bellevue. Only six of these flaws were repaired. Olympic Pipe Line Company tells us that the other flaws don’t meet the federal threshold for action. Some of these involved as much as 48% corrosion of the pipe. Again, how can this be true? How can we possibly explain this to our citizens? How can anyone regard this as an adequate level of protection for city residents?

While we regard Olympic’s Pipe Line Company’s Safety Plan as an important step in the right direction, our engineer tells us that the tests they propose will not provide us adequate information regarding the safety or condition of the pipe. He is recommending that we insist on hydrostatic testing, unless Olympic can present us with an equivalent alternative. We will be doing so, together with asking for better leak detection devices and automatic shut-off valves. We expect questions will be raised about our ability to make these requests under current federal law.

I would also note that it took us many months to obtain what we regarded as the most basic information from Olympic about the condition of the pipeline within Bellevue, and even the data we now have provides an inadequate picture. So we are also concerned about the need to impose stricter reporting requirements and “public right to know” laws on pipeline operators.

In sum, we believe there is an overwhelming case to be made for enhanced federal regulations in this area. Stricter standards are necessary, particularly in urban areas. And, because of the limited staffing of the Office of Pipeline Safety, where willing and able, states should be allowed to either act as a proxy for the federal government in overseeing compliance, or enact stricter safety standards. We strongly support the two pipeline safety bills currently before Congress introduced by members of our Washington delegation: S. 2004 and H.B. 3558.

Please work to see that we can ensure safety for our residents. We need better reporting requirements. We need better safety requirements, such as safety valves and leak detection devices. We need better federal funding for OPS. We need assurances that pipeline companies will be required to work now with first-responders such as our police and fire departments to develop emergency response plans. We need your help to ensure that the tragedy in Bellingham, and the dozens of other similar tragedies around the country, are not repeated.

Thank you.